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ABSTRACT

This symposium explores the impact of a range of family resources on children's successful transition from middle to high school. The five case studies that form this symposium examine the ways in which children's experiences at school are directly related to their parents' knowledge of school structure and bureaucracy; self- confidence in making demands of the school; educational background and ability to assist in homework and other school projects; and the time, energy, and money resources to provide resources ranging from school supplies to tutoring to extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, they document the relationship between student school success, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the ability of parents to wield their resources in supervising and monitoring their children, providing emotional, intellectual and financial support to them, and interceding on their behalf when necessary. The theoretical model underlying the research in the symposium is included. The model reflects earlier work and indicates that parental action is strongly determinative of school success and that family resources constrain the actions that families can take. The symposium case studies illustrate how the model works to create school success or failure. (Contains 16 references and 5 case studies.) (GCP)

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Population and Environmental Factors Promoting School Success
Overview of Symposium

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There is general agreement that family resources have a significant effect on the educational attainment of American children (Kuo & Hauser, 1996). Indeed, recent research demonstrates that for children growing up in industrial democracies, the resources of their families are more strongly related to their educational achievement than are characteristics of the schools these students attend (OECD, 1998). In view of this, we conducted a study to examine how family resources influence the educational attainment of children. Our goal was to expand our understanding of how parents translate resources into actions and how these actions affect the educational success of children.

This symposium explores the impact of a range of family resources on children's successful transition from middle to high school. Schools make extensive, and sometimes bewildering, demands on children, as well as their parents and other family members. Where parents cannot assist their children in responding to the intellectual and bureaucratic demands of the educational institution, their children face difficulties in achieving school success. The case studies that form this symposium examine the ways in which children's experiences at school are directly related to their parents' knowledge of school structure and bureaucracy; self-confidence in making demands of the school; educational background and ability to assist in homework and other school projects; and the time, energy and money resources to provide resources ranging from school supplies to tutoring to extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, they document the relationship between student school success, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ability of parents to wield their resources in supervising and monitoring their children, providing emotional, intellectual and financial support to them, and interceding on their behalf when necessary.

Our study is focused on a critical transition point in the educational progress of American children, the transition from middle to high school. Studies suggest that most dropping out of high school occurs in the first year and often hinges on the success of the transition from eighth to ninth grade (Langemann, 1993; Texas Education Agency, 1992). One previous study has focused on this transition in terms of parental actions and family resources. Baker and Stevenson (1986) interviewed 41 mothers of eighth graders about the strategies they might take to help their child make the transition to high school successfully. They found a strong association between family resources and the actions of mothers. Mothers with a college education knew more about their child's school performance, had more contact with the teachers, were more likely to enroll their students in college preparatory coursework, and were more likely to take action to manage their children's academic achievement than were mothers with less education. Baker and Stevenson also found that college-educated mothers of low-performing students reported using more strategies in anticipation of high school than did other mothers. Taken together, these findings suggest that better educated mothers understood what level of performance their child needed in order to succeed and took action, and action that was appropriate to the school setting, if their child was thought to be below this level.

Teacher expectations (Saracho, 1991), per-pupil expenditures (Hughes, 1991; Walberg and Fowler, 1988), and access to enrichment, as well as remedial activities (Oglesby and Gallagher, 1983; Lander and Sederberg, 1983) all have complex and related impacts on each other and on students. In many cases, parental actions must make up for lacks in these areas. Furthermore, as both Willis (1977) and Foley (1990) point out, in different ways and in different settings, the schools themselves provide radically different environments to different students and lead to very different outcomes. Willis explored the ways in which British working class boys not only left school to enter working class occupations, but left school wanting to continue in the kind of work typical of their parents. For these students, it was a matter of "principle" (Selby, 1999) to avoid co-option into the values of the school, which would distance them from their parents, their peers, and their home communities. Foley explores similar issues in a Texan context.

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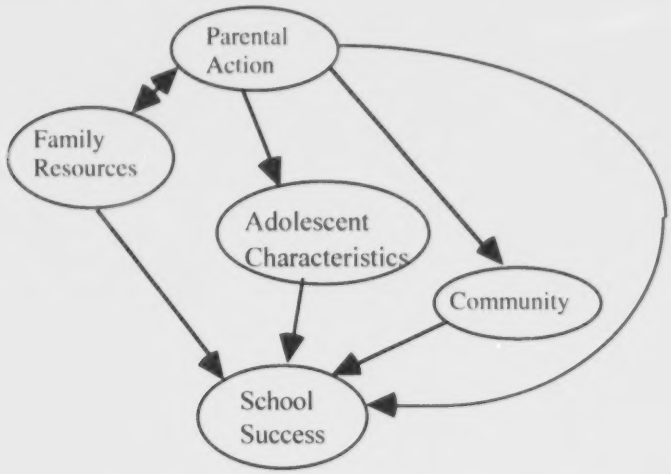
A study of successful schools in Texas (Dana Center, 1998) -- schools in which low income and ethnic minority children were the preponderance and also did well on the statewide standardized tests -- showed the degree to which schools had to develop extra resources to support students who could not necessarily bring them from home. Where parental resources were lacking, schools had to insist on high expectations, provide resources, and develop extra enrichment and remedial experiences for children. Taken together with the other literature, what this study suggests is that children's successful school careers depend, at least in part, on their access to a range of resources. Where students do not have access to resources through their parents, they must either receive them in some other way, or their school success will be jeopardized.

Parental resources are always important, but they loom particularly large as students make the transition from one school to another. A recent study by the LBJ School of Public Affairs found that as children move from elementary school to middle school and then from middle school to high school, they experience increasingly bureaucratic environments. They have less understanding themselves of the rules; they receive less individual attention; and they not infrequently experience genuine hardships. In one observation, a teacher had simply stopped teaching children in her elective video class. At Thanksgiving, the children in her class had difficulties aiming or focusing the camera, when, on their own, they tried to film each other.

In this situation, strong parental support, intervention, and provision of resources can make the difference. The figure below summarizes the theoretical model underlying the research described in this symposium. This model reflects earlier works by Romo and Falbo (1996) indicating that parental action is strongly determinative of school success and Edin and Lein (1997) indicating that family resources constrain the actions that families can take.

Table 1. Model of Impact of Parental Actions and Resources



Furthermore, as the model indicates, the impact of parental actions on student success are mediated by three other variables. Many parental actions depend on family resources, including material resources, as well as time, energy, and knowledge. Without these, parental actions may be minimal or ineffective. The impact of parental actions also depends on what is available to parents both through their informal networks and through the larger community. Students can receive significant assistance from others besides parents, and the impact of parental involvement can be magnified by the presence of community support and resources. The impact of parental actions also relates to the current needs of the students themselves. At one end, some students themselves are both knowledgeable about the school environment and assertive in seeking information and assistance on their own. They may also have a good academic grounding and be well poised for further academic achievement. Other students, at the other end of the spectrum may find the school environment bewildering, have difficulty articulating their need for help, and/or suffer from a poor academic preparation, learning or emotional difficulties, or the impact of family crises.

Thus, family resources, while important, are not the only variable of significance. In selecting cases for discussion in this symposium, we also paid attention to the degree to which students appear to need many or extensive resources. While our range of students does not include many students at an extreme level of need for resources, the coding of parental interviews indicated a range of needs on a number of dimensions:

- parents' perception of student difficulties with academic work;
- difficulties in entering into extra-curricular activities;
- difficulties with peers;
- slow emotional and intellectual development;
- presence of medical conditions or learning difficulties;
- recent family trauma from which the child is still recovering; and
- a sense that the high school presents more of a problem than a challenge.

Students ranged not only in the resources available to them, but in their immediate need for resources.

The symposium consists of case studies that illustrate how the model works to create school success or failure. The families who participated in the study were recruited from the same middle school, but our data were collected in their homes. The twenty families in this study responded to a mailing inviting participation in an interview study. The student and a parent in each family was interviewed at the end of the eighth grade year and after the first six-week grading period of the ninth grade year. While the families reflected a wide range of socioeconomic status, ethnicities, and family structures, the community and school setting was in an essentially middle class community

offering community services and resources. Furthermore, families in the study were not in the extreme ends of either poverty or wealth. The study included no households on welfare or on incomes below poverty level; it also included no families with household incomes over $100,000. Within this range of households, family resources had a considerable impact on outcomes for children making the transition from middle school to high school. These resources were not only financial, but, as indicated above, included the time, energy, and knowledge of parents and other family members, and the ability to access community resources, as well.

A series of diverse family case studies explore issues related to our model. We start with an ideal case, of a family with high resources supporting a son -- certainly with the needs of a teenager, but making no extraordinary demands, and indeed well-poised for success. In this case, effective parental action promoted the dazzling success of their talented and gifted son. Then, we present another family with high resources, illustrating how their parental actions were essential for the successful transition of their special education son. While presenting a number of needs and struggling with the high school experience, he was successfully negotiating the first year of high school. The third family we present exemplifies how families with low resources can mobilize to take effective action to promote the successful transition of their daughter, but a daughter who herself presents relatively few problems at school. Our fourth case study explains how constraints in parental time leads children from large families to flounder in high school. Finally, our last case study will delineate how families with low resources and ineffective parental actions can result in a student dropping out.

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Case Study 1: The Ideal Family and Student
By: Cindy Blankenship

The family I am presenting is one whose son made a successful transition from middle school to high school. At the end of his first year in high school, Kevin Anderson had earned all As (7) on his report card, most of which were TAG (talented and gifted) or AP (advanced placement) courses. He also had perfect attendance, made the varsity swim team, and was active socially, making many new friends. We attribute this successful outcome primarily to two things: continuous parental involvement and action, and to resources his parents provided.

In this paper, I will first describe some general characteristics of his family followed by a more detailed look at the parental characteristics and resources we believe influenced Kevinís success.

Family Characteristics

This family lived in an older area of a suburb in central Texas. Kevinís parents and a younger sister (age 13) lived at home with him, which was described by the interviewer as nicely kept, spacious, and currently under renovation at the time of the interview. His mother had a masters degree and worked as a social worker. She described herself as a very ìhands on motherî who tended to ìmicromanageî her children. Her belief was they, during their teen years, need her more than ever.

Kevinís father also had a masters degree and worked at a state agency. He was much more laid-back and less active in Kevinís life than his mother. His relationship with his son was defined by mutual respect. This was interpreted by Kevin as his father trusting him to do the right thing. Kevin valued this standing with his father and said he felt bad when he would have to talk to him about something he did wrong.

Kevinís younger sister, age 13, was described by Kevin as likeable, never interfering, and perfectionistic in her own schoolwork. While Kevin earned straight As in school, his As were low, whereas his sister earned high As.

Continuous Parental Involvement and Action during Middle School

When examining continuous parental involvement and action during his middle school experience, one would not have to spend much time with this family to see the extent of his motherís involvement in Kevinís life. While his father did participate somewhat, it was his mother who maintained close and consistent contact with everything Kevin did.

When Kevin was in middle school, he told us that ìMy mom knows pretty much every single thing that goes on around my school; so she knows, you know, whatís going to happen and stuff.î Then a little later in the interview he said ìMy mom controls me so much. Like sheíll ask if I have homework five times after school, and then, you know, sheíll bother me about doing it.î

I think it needs to be said that Kevin complained several times about his motherís controlling nature. While he stated on several occasions his dislike for her consistent involvement, which he sometimes called ìhounding sessions,î it became somewhat obvious later that what she ìhoundedî him about became internalized and a part of how he handled himself and his work in high school. In other words, what began as nagging and interfering to him became standards from which he began to live by.

To continue with describing his mother, one of the things she valued was knowing most of his teachers. She would visit his school on a regular basis and talk with his teachers about how things were going with him. She said that on several occasions, when visiting, she had frequently gotten what she called ìa very big cold shoulder.î She said they had an attitude of ìYour kid is an A student. Why are you up here?î ìWellî, she said, ìIím a pretty determined person, you know. So I just kept going up.î She often wondered, however, how it would be when he was in high school. That is, what her role would or

should be. She said ìIn high school....I think my struggle will be to figure out what role Iím supposed to be playing as a parent with a son in high school.î

Her involvement with his teachers was also demonstrated in a situation Kevin was struggling with. One of his middle school teachers apparently had a reputation of being very hard and telling her students on the first day of class that she did not believe in giving As. His mother not only went to this teacher and asked her why she would say such a thing, but she also went to Kevinís Theatre Arts teacher, with whom he got along very well, and asked him to give Kevin a little bit of encouragement. She said it was important to her that he liked his teachers and had a good relationship with them. She also told Kevin several times that it was important to get comfortable talking with teachers because, particularly in college, she wanted him to be to be able to go up to them and further explore.

Another significant thing she was involved in with his middle school was encouraging them to establish T.A.G. (talented and gifted) classes. Prior to her involvement, this school did not participate in the T.A.G. program. She also wanted to help them overcome a stigma that she believed this school carried. That is, with it being downtown, it was assumed there was nothing but poor kids there.

She ended up working with the vice-principal in establishing these T.A.G. classes and to make them equal and competitive with other schools in their district. She said ìI told this vice-principal whatís going to end up happening if you donít have something equal here is that when theyíve (parents) got their T.A.G. kids and theyíre looking for a school, theyíre going to call you up and Ö ask you what this program is like. And when you tell them, theyíre going to go ësorryí and Ö go somewhere else.î

Another quality Kevin consistently told us was that his parents were always available for him whenever needed. He said they would put down things they were doing to help him, whether with schoolwork or some other issue. While he always took pride in doing his own work, he would sometimes ask his father to assist him with his math, or his mother to proof read something he had written.

In this same way, he said his mother was always there to support him emotionally. She told us that it was always important to keep the communication lines open. For instance, it was a common occurrence for Kevin to feel stressed out, or ìan emotional mess,î as his mother put it, about doing a particular project. When this would happen, she would first sit down with him and listen to him complain about his teacher and the assignment. Then she would help him break the project down or map out what to do and when. He said his mother was very good at supporting and helping him through these difficult times and that it was very comforting.

One of Kevinís biggest problems, admitted by both him and his mother, was with procrastination and time management. When we asked her the question of what she wished Kevin would do but doesnít, and, what problems she thinks he might be facing in making the transition to high school, she responded ìTime management.î She said ìI wish he would not wait until the last minute on things.î This was a consistent theme throughout the interview. She also said ìI just trust that heís bright enough to figure out when heís an emotional mess itís because he waited until the last minute.î

This issue is something his mother had been working consistently with him on. She said she would ask him regularly how things were going and if his homework was done. It was her way of helping him stay on top of things. His perception of this was that she would ask him several times a day and then bother him about doing it. She said they have had lots of talks about how he may be able to do it [referring to waiting until the last minute and then pulling out aą A], ìbut,î she told him, ìyouíre going to go crazy doing it.î She believed, however, that he was getting a little better as they moved from sixth to seventh to eighth grade. She stated ìI have noticed that my husband and I have to do far less micro-management of his time.î

One of the things they both believed has really helped him was with the use of a calendar she bought him. He used it to write down when assignments were due so he could plan ahead when to start them. She said ìI try to give him concrete ways of dealing with it.î

Preparing Him for High School

Another quality we found in his mother was how she prepared him for high school long before he entered its doors. She told him that grades in high school were now more important because they were going to be permanently written down, and that his classes were going to ask more of him, and his teachers were going to be less helpful in making sure he gets his work done. In other words, she told him that he will need to be more independent and responsible for his work.

She also felt it was important for him to find a place, or ìa niche,î as she called it. If he did, she believed he would be fine in making this transition. Her words were: ìI think the kids to worry about in high school are the kids who just sort of wander and donít really have a group they identify with, and donít really have a goal. So Iím really not that concerned because I already know some of the teachers over there and the group of kids (referring to swimmers) heís going to be running around with.î

Him being able to identify or feel a part of a group has also motivated her in the past to encourage his participation in several groups or programs. For example, he would spend his summers and free time participating in programs like U.T. Kids, or band camp at U.T., and lots of swimming programs since the 5th grade. She said it was important to her that he get as much exposure to others as possible.

One good example of how she used this principle, of belonging, to help pave the way for his transition into high school was by encouraging his participation in a summer swimming program. The summer before he started high school, he was involved in a swimming program where he met and befriended a lot of swimmers who were upper classmen at his high school. She also helped by meeting and talking with some of his swimming coaches. Kevin said ìMy parents talk to the coaches, and those coaches talk to coaches at the high school. ...and everyone has heard about my times (swimming times)...so everyone is looking forward to me going over there....î Here, the niche or group she was looking for him belonging to has already begun developing. Because of this, he was much less worried about making the transition into high school because he knew he already had a place waiting for him.

Continuous Parental Involvement and Action in High school

Her action and participation in his life did not change much after he entered high school. She still maintained many of the same qualities she did while he was in middle school. For instance, she still knew most everything that went on in his life and, according to Kevin, still made him update her regularly. She knew, for example, before school even started, that his biology class was going to be a very difficult. She said ìit was one of those (classes) that everyone talks aboutÖ(so) I worried about that.î She also knew that if he turned in an assignment late he would lose 10 points, which she believed was good practice because it prepared him not only for college but for the work world.

She also knew all the kids he spent his time with, and their parents; and most of the kids in his T.A.G. classes, some of which he did not even know. She told us she would ask him if he knew so-and-so in his class and then would find out that he did not even know him/her. She believed it was because he was listening and really keyed in to what was being taught.

Another quality she maintained was always being available and supportive whenever he needed. When he was an emotional mess over a biology assignment, for instance, ìfirst,î she said, ìyou have to have the 45-minutes where he talks about how much he hates her (his teacher), you know. Then, once he gets through with that, weíd talk through it,î like she did when he was in middle school. She told him ì(your teacher) will teach you more than just the academicsÖ. What sheís going to teach you is how to get ready to go to college down the road.î

A more specific example of her helping and supporting him was when he was struggling with a project where he had to design a cell organelle. He was apparently clueless about how to do it and was very upset about it. She helped him by getting on the internet and

pulling things off just to show him. She explained, ìThe thing is, heís ten times more creative than I am, but I think more than anything is to just having him calm down enough to think about it. He was so busy with the emotional part of it Öthat he wasnít being creative. And, when he did, once he settled down about it, everything was fine.î Kevin said his mother had really helped him throu gh things by comforting him when she saw he was really bothered or stressed out about something.

Desiring more space and independence from parents is normal for most teenagers, and giving Kevin this was his motherís biggest struggle, she admitted. Kevin had requested more independence, but his mother was having difficulty letting go. She said, ìI know that what I can do best to help him is sort of back off, which would be, of course, the hardest thing for me to do.î She also said, ìYou know, I just have this habit of when he gets in the car from school and I ask him ëHow was school? What do you have tonight?í And Iím trying to, because we have talked about it, quit doing that, because that adds stress to him.î Kevin told her ìThis makes me more stressed out when you do that. And I need to be able to get in the car and not have to talk about school.î She said she was satisfied with that because he was giving her a reason behind it, one that made sense. So she essentially listened and was very in-tuned with his needs.

Internalized Motherís Teaching

With a little more independence from his mother, Kevin was able to demonstrate what he learned from her in handling his school and related affairs. He had essentially internalized and began practicing many of the things she had taught him. For example, procrastination had become much less of an issue. He said one of his biggest accomplishment in high school was being able to juggle his schedule. Specifically he told us: ìYou just have to be organized. I (use to) procrastinate with projects, you know, until the night they were due and still got a 100 on it. What did I learn from that? Nothing, except thatÖ you really canít do that (in high school).î He also said ìMy mom has really helped me with, like, getting that planner. That has really helped because I have it all on paper, I can check it offÖ. My mom, she has really shown me how to organize and use my time.î Another example was when he explained why he received a B, his first B, in biology. When asked why he thought he got that grade, his response demonstrated his ability to reflect on mistakes and make necessary changes, a quality he practiced many times with his mother. He explained, ìI went into it not being organized. I didnít have (the right) expectations of the classÖ. I didnít really pay attention to my answersÖand I thought she would accept it, and she didnít so I got low grades. I didnít have the calendar and the organization. Now I feel much more comfortable on how my time is spentÖ.now I carry all the books I needÖI take them into schoolÖand when I come home. I have all my books here so if I need to studyÖor if I have a little extra time to workÖI will get it finished even though itís not due for a couple of days.î

His mother also noticed his ability to carry the responsibility himself. Her words were: ìYou know itís still hard for me when he says ëI can handle it.í Itís still hard for me, as a parent, to step back Ö because weíve always been very hands on, you know. So, itís really hard to step back, but it has just surprised me because heís doing it.î Later she said, ìUnbeknownst to be, he really does play over in his head what he needs to do and measuring that against (what he wants to do). I mean, heís had a few times where heís been invited to do things, and he didnít even tell me about it, but he said, ëI told them I couldnít do it because I knew I had this to do.í Pretty smart. So, thatís made me feel good because I know that heíll do what he needs to do.î She said she felt much more confident because she saw he was really able to take care of himself.

Finally, he had also internalized his motherís value to work hard, always do your best, and become all you can. She said she always believed that you get what you expect from your kids, and that Kevin had to make good grades because she knew that was what he was capable of doing. Kevin told us his parents believed he could accomplish a lot. His words

were, ìThey want me to accomplish what I am capable of, all that I amÖ.(and) I donít want to be capable of more than I was able to accomplishÖbecause I didnít work hard enough.î

Resources Provided by Parents

Along with continuous parental involvement and action, resources provided by his parents also played a significant role in Kevinís successful outcome. These resources essentially enhanced the effectiveness of their action and involvement. That is, with more money, time, and education, their influence was much more effective than without it. For instance, with money, this enabled Kevin to participate in many of the sports programs he was involved in, which, as stated earlier, made a big difference in his making a successful transition.

With time, his parents were always available and therefore able to help and support him in many ways. His mother, in particular, spent a great deal of time with Kevin talking about school and many other issues, working on homework and projects, and always attending his sporting events. His mother not only had the time to do this, she made it a priority to find it. It was important to her that she always be available whenever he needed her, and, according to him, she was.

With their level of education, both parents being college graduates, they were able to understand dilemmas and solve problems he was facing in school. For example, his mother understood how to manage the school experience because, being a graduate student at one time, she had plenty of experience with this. She was able to demonstrate and model for him how to map out projects, relate to teachers, and manage his workload. They both understood and valued learning and education, which also influenced them preparing him at each stage of his educational experience: from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school, and now from high school to college. In other words, they knew a lot of what to expect and prepared him accordingly.

Without the resources of money, time, and education, the impact of their action and involvement may have been somewhat limited.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kevin made a successful transition because of his parentsí continuous involvement and action, and also because of the resources they provided. While his mother seemed to bother him in many ways, with her continuous involvement, she still maintained her influence throughout this transitional period. He continued to look towards her for advice and support. While he made several negative comments about her, there were many times he stated that she really helped him, and that he valued her support and influence. I guess the best test of her influence is seeing him, when she stepped back, carry on with his responsibilities in much the same fashion she would. In other words, she taught him something.

Case Study 2: The Ideal Family and Special Needs Students

Nicole A. Amador and K. Denise Bradley

Introduction

Parental knowledge is one mechanism that empowers parents to guide their adolescent's academic success. Knowledge is fundamental in allowing the parent to act as an advocate for the adolescent. For example, having knowledge of problems, possible solutions, and a range of available resources and effective combinations of those resources allows the parent to act to resolve problems that the adolescent may encounter. However, both knowledge and action are crucial to the adolescent's success. A parent could lack

knowledge and thus fail to take action, have the knowledge and still fail to take action, or act without sufficient knowledge.

The Phillips family demonstrates this relation between parental knowledge and action and the adolescent's successful transition from middle to high school. They utilize several family, school, and community resources: academic skills, knowledge, time, friends of the boys, siblings, teachers, school staff, PTA, computer equipment, recreational groups, sports groups, and religion. Of these resources, the family's access to knowledge is the key to the adolescents' success. The Phillips also illustrate the power of knowledge as a resource when faced with multiple obstacles from very different children with very different needs. This paper will demonstrate how the parents' knowledge allowed them to mobilize their family, school, and community resources to help their sons make the transition from middle to high school successfully.

Family Characteristics

The Phillips family included Jack, the father, Kathy, the mother, both middle-aged, and three biological sons, Blake, Joshua, and Justin. Jack had a bachelor's degree and was also a CPA. He owned his own business, located near their house and across the street from the high school the boys attended. Although Jack worked approximately 50 hours per week in the family business, he managed to stay actively involved in the lives of all of his children. For example, he allowed the boys to earn extra money working part-time in the family business and helped organize and coached several club soccer teams in the area.

At the time of the interviews, Kathy was pursuing a bachelor's degree in music education at a large university in a nearby city. In addition to her own schooling, the mother also helped out with the family business and volunteered much of her time to the school's PTA. Although she maintained this busy schedule, she considered her own work secondary to the needs of her children.

Blake, the eldest son, was attending college when we met the family. Joshua, the second oldest son, made the transition from his junior to senior year during the time of our interviews. He was nominated for Academic All American as a junior, and was in training for the Olympic gymnastic team. Justin, the third son and one of the participants of the study, was 14 years old at the end of his eighth-grade school year. At that time, he was involved in student council, football, basketball, track, soccer, speech, and choir, among other activities. In addition, he was elected as a member of the National Junior Honor Society and earned recognition regionally for his musical and vocal talents. Despite a recent diagnosis of dyslexia, Justin was able to accomplish all of this while maintaining good grades in school.

Jack and Kathy were also parents of Carlos, a Hispanic boy in Special Education. When the family lived in another state, Carlos and his biological mother, their housekeeper at the time, lived with the Phillips' family. When the Phillips moved to their current home, Carlos moved with the family. Later, Carlos' biological mother followed, deciding that she wanted Carlos back in her custody. Because Carlos had lived with the Phillips for the past eight years, Jack and Kathy thought it was in his best interest to pursue the matter legally, and were awarded joint managing conservators with custody of Carlos. He is now part of the Phillips family, but maintains a good relationship with his biological mother, whom he talks with over the phone every Sunday. Having a learning disability, Carlos was enrolled in special education courses. Even though he had a difficult time in school, Carlos exceled in soccer, and the family hoped that this talent would drive him to succeed academically.

In addition to the four boys, Jack and Kathy adopted an emotionally disturbed daughter, Wendy, who was 10 years old when we met the family. Wendy was described by her brothers as a crack baby, and due to uncontrollable tantrums often had to be physically restrained. Her erratic behavior was problematic for the family, and at the time of the second interview, Wendy had been placed in a psychiatric facility.

In general, the Phillips were very family-oriented. In addition to being actively involved in each others' lives, they maintained a cohesive family structure. For example,

despite their busy schedules, it was a family priority to sit down together for dinner every night. Also, they regularly attended church as a family and were actively involved in church activities. Furthermore, it was important to support individual interests of the children. The family accomplished this by attending the children's extracurricular functions as a group. One of the outstanding characteristics exemplified by this strong family bond was their effective communication skills. This family openly discussed problems with each other and worked together to resolve them. For example, household rules and their consequences were discussed and decided upon by all family members. All were expected to share in the responsibility of the home, and if they did not, the consequences agreed upon by the family followed.

The home environment created by the parents facilitated this family cohesiveness. Being of an upper-middle social economic status, Jack and Kathy were able to provide their family with a large house, located on over 7 acres in an isolated, rural area not far from downtown amenities. The lot included a soccer practice field for the boys and a small pond for swimming and fishing. Inside the house was a large game room equipped with a pool table and other activities for the kids. Elsewhere in the house was a computer and other entertainment equipment. The availability of these things encouraged the kids to engage in activities at home, which allowed for better parental supervision.

The mother, Kathy, and her two eighth grade sons, Justin and Carlos participated in the study.

Middle School

The Phillips demonstrated how individual differences can result in unique school experiences despite similar familial influences. This paper is not meant as a comparison of Justin and Carlos, but rather to illustrate their individuality in the transition from middle to high school, and their parents ability to successfully meet the needs of each adolescent.

Justin was described by the interviewer as, "the perfect child." He was very proud of himself and happy to share all of his accomplishments. He succeeded academically and attributed this success to his abilities, hard work, parents' support, and the help of his older brothers. He felt that his sports and church involvement made it easier for him to succeed in middle school. He was very confident in himself, and saw nothing as an obstacle to his success in school. His mother described him as having a "stick-to-it" attitude and being a self-starter and independent worker. Justin enjoyed school and only made positive comments about his school experience. His mother, on the other hand, indicated that he had only one problem in middle school: a personality conflict with his algebra teacher. With the encouragement of his mother, he was able to resolve this problem on his own. The only aspect of his school experience Justin would have changed was the amount of time his parents were able to devote to helping him. He commented on the amount of time necessary for his parents to attend to the needs of Wendy and Carlos. Overall, however, Justin was very pleased with his middle school experience and looked forward to high school and college.

As a learning disabled adolescent in special education, Carlos had a unique set of needs, which required his parents to develop knowledge of the resources available learning to disabled students within the school setting. He occasionally conflicted with teachers, school staff, and other students, which resulted in detention and, at one time, in-school suspension. He also fell behind in school work and thus received poor grades, causing his removal from the basketball team. Carlos was easily swayed by gang members and other students who encouraged him to engage in negative and inappropriate behaviors. He worsened these problems by failing to tell his parents of the trouble he was in at school, making it more difficult for his parents to help him. Fortunately, the parents had developed effective relationships with the school administrators, facilitating communication about Carlos' problems and allowing the parents to take action on his behalf.

Carlos' one strength was his ability to play soccer. According to Kathy, soccer was going to be, "his ticket to his self-esteem in high school." Even Carlos felt that soccer

made it easier for him to succeed in school because it, "took up time," keeping him out of trouble and away from "bad" friends. In addition to soccer, Carlos indicated that the support of his family helped him in school. James and his parents assisted him with schoolwork. Also, his parents helped him resolve issues at school by keeping in close contact with his teachers. By closely monitoring his activities and choice of friends, Jack and Kathy were better able to help him avoid future problems.

Anticipating High School

When asked what they had heard about the change from middle to high school, both boys and their mother responded similarly: all mentioned the large size of the school, the increased responsibility, and the variety of activities and opportunities. However, when discussing their feelings about these changes, their viewpoints were very different. According to their mother, "Justin was very excited," whereas, "Carlos was very apprehensive." Justin had done well in middle school and was very confident in himself and his abilities. He was not really worried about anything in high school. Justin knew there would be negative peer pressures, but he saw this as something with which every teen must deal. He talked about his strong religious background, as well as his morals and values, and believed that these would enable him to make the "right decisions." He saw his parents and his older brothers as a source of support to him, stating that if he ever encountered any problems in high school, that he could deal with them by talking them over with his family. Overall, he was enthusiastic about what high school had to offer. He knew he wanted to make good grades so he could get into a good college, and along with most adolescents, he was excited over the possibility of getting his driver's license. Justin was a very sociable child, and because of this, his mother was looking forward to all of the social opportunities high school has to offer. Justin was very talented, and had been involved in many activities in middle school. According to his mother, it was very important to him that he make the varsity soccer team in high school, as well as play football and make All-State choir. As for his mother, she wanted "Justin to be everything Justin can be," whether it be soccer, football, or choir. She wanted him to go in the "direction he wants to go," and said that the family would support him in whatever he chose to pursue. Overall, she wanted high school to be a "fun" experience for him. She knew academics were important for his future, but it was not, "worth it to her to put more pressure on her children than is necessary." She said that high school could either be the "most fun a kid could have, or it could be so much pressure that they crack." She was hoping that through her past experiences in raising high school boys, that she had become a "wiser parent" now. She wanted her children to have the entire high school experience: both the academic and the social aspects. Justin's mother saw this as the time in which "Justin finds out who Justin is."

Carlos viewed the change from middle to high school as somewhat of a challenge. Though he heard that the teachers were good, he was afraid they were going to be a lot harder, not as tolerant, and were going to require him to be more mature. Being in special education classes in middle school, Carlos was afraid that his classes would be harder in high school, and that he would not get any "breaks" there. In addition to the academic side of school, Carlos worried about the other kids and the possibilities of getting into fights. His mother had a similar concern because of a past experience Carlos had with a gang. Overall, however, both Carlos and his mother knew that high school had a lot to offer him. He was a talented soccer player, and like Justin, looked forward to the chance to play on the varsity soccer team in high school. According to his mother, "his abilities as a soccer player give him that little edge that he needs." In high school, Carlos wanted to pass all his classes, stay out of trouble, have more friends, get his driver's license, but above all, play soccer. In addition to these things, his mother mentioned passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test. Passing the TAAS is required of some special education students prior to graduation. Although not required of him, Kathy said successfully completing this task was something he really wanted to do because he had been

unsuccessful passing the test previously. She saw this as a huge goal for Carlos, but as something that would be necessary for his self-esteem. She wanted "Carlos to like Carlos at the end of high school." She wanted him to "be able to make friends, to make good choices, and to feel comfortable about making good choices." She also wanted him to "stand strong for what he believes in and not be swayed." She thought there was "no better testing ground for this than high school." Above all, his mother wanted Carlos to be able to feel good about his "abilities and his specialness, while accepting his limitations," and to be happy with himself.

Kathy was aware of the challenges and opportunities brought about by the high school experience, but also, had knowledge of the school system. One of her older boys came home and cried every day for the first week of school because of the changes associated with high school. He had a difficult time adjusting to the length of the classes, the block scheduling, and the overall size of the school. Because of this, Kathy thought it was "crucial" that both Justin and Carlos attend a summer orientation that helps the students acclimate to the high school environment. She saw this as one of the most important things that she could do to facilitate the transition to high school. In addition to this, Kathy knew every principal at the high school, as well as each of the counselors. With her older boys, she had six years of experience with the teachers and administrators at the high school. She knew what the school had to offer Justin and Carlos, and could use this knowledge to help both boys have a successful high school experience.

High School

The transition to high school carried with it the same pattern of experiences Justin and Carlos had in middle school. For Justin, his self-motivation and -direction, combined with his outgoing personality, helped him overcome the challenges associated with the transition; however, for Carlos, many of the difficulties he encountered in middle school continued into high school. Despite obstacles faced by Justin and Carlos, both made a successful transition to high school. The key factor to this success was parental knowledge and action: the parents monitored and evaluated the boys' progress in school, and intervened when necessary.

In preparation for this transition, the Phillips spent much of the summer trying to understand dyslexia to empower Justin with the knowledge that his disability is not something of which he should be ashamed. "So, what we were able to help him understand is you go to the teachers and you explain what your problem is and they are more than willing to help you." With the encouragement of his family, Justin was able to approach all of his teachers individually rather than have his mother call each of them on his behalf to explain his particular situation. He found the teachers to be very willing to assist him, and when he had any problem with a teacher not accommodating his needs, he took it upon himself to contact the school's advocate for dyslexic students. Due to the parents' previous experiences with Carlos in middle school, their knowledge of school programs and resources for learning disabled students required by The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) assisted them in helping Justin deal with his disability in high school.

Although his learning disability affected his grades in high school, Justin continued to complete honors and Advanced Placement coursework at or above a satisfactory level. A large part of his success was due to the actions taken by his mother. Early in his first semester, Kathy visited the school and arranged to (a) have a tutor meet with Justin on a regular basis, (b) order his books on tape, (c) be able to type up Justin's homework assignments for him, and (d) get extensions for homework and projects.

According to Kathy, despite some academic difficulties, "Justin loves everything about high school." She explained that Justin was a very social kid, and that the first week of school he came home excited to be in high school. "I love this place. This place is great. Everything about this place!" Justin enjoyed that all his friends, whether from church, school, or club soccer, now attended the same school. He also made several new friends, some of whom were friends of John's, his older brother. Justin explained that he

and John got along really well, and that John helped him adjust to high school life. "He's cool with me at school. It makes things a lot easier."

High school was everything Justin expected. He really liked all of his teachers. He was excited about the opportunity to play varsity soccer, and possibly be chosen as one of the captains of the team. Although Justin realized peer pressure to go to parties and drink alchohol was common, as anticipated, he did not find it to be a problem for himself. "Well, most of my friends have those people in their neighborhoods that pressure them to do stuff, so I guess living here helps a lot." The only negative comment made by Justin about high school was the increase in homework required of him, again, something he expected. Unfortunately, he sometimes chose to solve this problem by copying Carlos' or John's assignments. "Carlos has some of the same classes, so if he does something before me, I can copy off of that or John might have project stuff he might have saved."

For Carlos, the transition to high school was not as smooth as it was for Justin. "Carlos came home practically crying the first two weeks of school. He hated everything, but soccer. Everything." His mother explained that most of this dislike was a result of his poor social skills. "I have no friends in any of my classes," he complained. A shy and anxious teen, Carlos did not make friends easily. He also refused to ask questions, so the first week of school he got lost on campus often.

Academically, Carlos struggled. Besides soccer in which he earned all A's, he had a strong C average in his academic courses. Kathy expected him to face difficulties with the high school curriculum, because the teachers don't "baby" him like his middle school teachers did. His parents tried to prepare Carlos for this change, knowing that it would be a challenge for him to be more self-reliant. "Because he was abused as a younger child, we really babied him. And I think we're partially to blame for not expecting a whole lot from him. His disabilities were such that we weren't able to expect a whole lot."

Carlos' academic difficulties were counterbalanced by his athletic abilities. Playing soccer at the high school level introduced him to a larger group of friends, and his parents encouraged this because they knew this group of kids would be a positive influence on his academic performance. As his mother pointed out, "he knows that in order to stay in soccer, he can't be in any trouble at school, and he has to pass all his classes. So, he's making an extra effort, because he can be a starting goalie. And, and, he has that ability, so that desire to be the starting goalie has kept him from... kept him doing his homework and kept him from making poor choices." As his mother anticipated, soccer was the key to Carlos' success in high school.

Conclusion

The parents were aware that their knowledge of Justin's and Carlos' experiences in school was crucial for any parental action needed to ensure the boys' academic success. Kathy's biggest complaint was the difficulty she experienced in reaching the boys' teachers. She explained that Carlos had 7 teachers and James had 8 other teachers, so simply keeping in contact with the sheer number of teachers was difficult. Furthermore, unlike at the middle school, Kathy did not already know all the teachers at the high school, making her micromanagement of Carlos' assignments and academic progress more difficult. She explained to him, "I don't know every teacher at the high school, and they're not going to baby you anymore, so how can we help you to be more successful?" One way Kathy encouraged both Carlos and Justin to complete their homework was by getting them to use a dayplanner. "Carlos and Justin can't remember their homework, especially Carlos. He's very forgetful about what the assignment was." Now, "he's writing projects down, which is a huge improvement." This is just one example of how these parents acted on their knowledge to help their adolescents make the transition to high school successfully.

When asked what she could do to help her boys succeed in high school, Kathy stressed the importance of knowledge and using the knowledge effectively to be able to act on her children's behalf. "I think it's really important for parents to know what classes their kids have, what the names of the teachers are, what the number for the homework

hotline is, so that the parent can call and say, 'Oh, by the way, you know you did have homework in such and such and you do have a project due.' Attend their functions. I think that's very important. We will be at every soccer game. We will be at the choir concert. We will be at those things for them. Parents need to listen when a kid says, 'This teacher's being unreasonable.' Sometimes the kid is being unreasonable, but sometimes the teacher is, and you really have to weigh that."

Case Study 3: Community Help for Low Resource Families
Patricia Castaneda-English

Studies have shown that when parents encourage and support their children's education, regardless of economic status and parent education, the children demonstrate success in school. Conversely, however, many studies on Hispanic students' educational outcomes argue that family background variables such as language use, SES and parent education are factors that more often than not are barriers to educational success. The case study presented here is one that demonstrates that despite the presence of these "barriers" in this Hispanic family environment, positive educational outcomes can and do occur for this student. This particular case study demonstrates how the parents, in spite of their limited resources, used the community support available through their church membership as a resource to produce positive educational outcomes for their child. In addition, the parents use of effective parental actions and family support facilitated this process. The family discussed in this case study is one whose daughter, Becky, made a successful transition from middle school to high school. Having taken very challenging courses in middle school and in high school, the resources/support available to Becky culminated in her earning a B average during the ninth grade, her first year in high school. The resources/support discussed herein were chief contributors to Becky's successful transition to and ultimate first year success in high school.

This paper will attempt to provide insight into how the family's use of the church as a main community resource, which in turn defined the quality of the child-parent relationship and family support facilitated Becky's academic success and eventual successful transition to high school. A description of the family characteristics is presented first followed by a discussion of the resources.

Family Characteristics

Becky's family was a biologically intact family—a father, mother and their three teenage daughters. The parents were relatively young—the mother was 37 years old and the father, 38 years old. The daughters were 16, 14, and 13 years of age. Becky, the student interviewed for this research, was 14-years old at the time of the interview. The family's home was situated in a middle-class neighborhood. From the visible front yard, living room and dining room areas, the house looked spacious, neat, and clean.

The parents' educational background was limited. The father had taken some college courses at the local community college (approx. 1 year of courses). He stated he had "taken courses for my kind of work...about 30 credits, pretty close to an Associates Degree". This was an interesting comment since the average amount of credits necessary to earn an Associates Degree is approximately 60 hours. The mother had only completed a 7th grade education in Mexico. However, during the initial interview she proudly announced that she had earned a GED (which she did not have when Becky was born). Although the father spoke English well and with some fluency, the mother had difficulty expressing herself well in English. She explained that her primary language was Spanish, and after being asked by the interviewer which language she felt most comfortable speaking, she responded, "It's because there's a lot of words that I know in Spanish but I cannot, they don't come out in English, you know, it's hard." She did, however, make an effort to

communicate predominantly in English during the interviews. The father and daughters were bilingual, and felt comfortable speaking both English and Spanish.

Both parents worked outside the home and were employed full time at physically demanding jobs. The father worked approximately 60 hours a week as what he described doing "facilities, you know, maintenance work." His job as a janitor sometimes required long work days and he felt overworked..."Sometimes they make us work 7 days a week, 10 hours a day, sometimes 12 hours a day, yeá, long hours at work…it wears you down." For this reason he felt that he was not as available for his daughters when they needed help with school related tasks. Although the mother worked full time at an assembly type job, her work schedule (6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.) allowed her to be home before her daughters returned from school. This provided her with the opportunity to interact with her daughters after school, oversee the completion of their homework, and supervise their daily house chores.

The oldest daughter attended the same high school as Becky. Not much information was related about this daughter except that the parents believed that Becky was much brighter and more mature than her. The perception of the parents was that their oldest daughter had had a good experience in high school so far. They relied on her for much of the information they knew about the high school prior to Becky's entering the high school. The youngest daughter attended the same middle school that Becky attended for three years prior to entering high school. Again, not much information was shared concerning this daughter. An interesting note, however, was that Becky did share with the interviewer that the youngest sister had her own room while the two oldest had to share a room. Much unlike how she normally acted with her parents, Becky had apparently voiced her disagreement about this to her parents, but her parents had sided with her youngest sister and allowed her to have her own room. Although not explicitly verbalized by Becky, she left the interviewer with the impression that her younger sister got her own way when she wanted it, and this bothered Becky. In general, both of Becky's sisters were described by the parents as less cooperative when it came to helping around the house..."she's (Becky) always the first one to jump in and help. The other two we got to drag them out there to help us."

Becky was a bright girl who was cooperative, easy to get along with, a hard worker, persistent, and responsible with her work both in school and at home. She believed that if you worked hard, did your homework, and attended class, you could succeed in school. She sometimes doubted her ability to excel in school, but felt that persistence would carry her through, "I don't like giving up very easily so I always try, if I don't get a problem I'll do it over and over again until I try to get it and if I don't, I just go to tutoring." Her parents described her as someone who's "always out to better herself, especially in school, reading and everything, she tries to be better every year." During middle school, when asked what she wanted to accomplish in high school, Becky responded that she just wanted to make straight A's. This same question during her first year in high school yielded the response, "I want to get as many credits as I can…and pass all my classes and get no F's." Although Becky expressed some concern over her ability to excel in honors or advanced placement classes, her parents, especially her mother, were confident that she would do well academically and socially as she made the transition to high school.

Becky and her parents seemed to have no problems agreeing on issues, therefore, their relationship was virtually conflict-free. When asked about disagreements between them, Becky's mother related that she and Becky disagreed over such things as food, "sometimes when I cook something that she doesn't like, she gives me all these reasons why she doesn't like it…"; and Becky's joking, "sometimes I disagree with her jokes, I tell her not to go too far because sometimes she goes too far and she can hurt somebody's feelings…"; and they disagreed about movies, "we have different tastes in movies—she likes funny ones and I don't." As is evident from the mother's statements, the disagreements between Becky and her mother were quite minor. Also, both parents stated that Becky had never gotten into trouble at school or at home. During the interview, they had a difficult time coming up with any examples of when Becky might have broken the

rules. However, they jokingly acknowledged that the time might still come when Becky could get in trouble, "I don't think she has ever broke the rules, not yet. Not yet, she's fourteen right now, I don't know..." Overall, Becky was a child who did not have any discipline problems either at home or at school.

As stated previously, the parents' reliance on the church as a community resource, which in turn lent itself to enhancing the quality of the parent-child relationship and family support, helped insure Becky's academic success during the eighth grade, ninth grade, and during the transition from one grade to the next. This case study exemplifies how families with otherwise low resources use community help to inform their actions in support of their children's school success. The resources are discussed next.

The Church as a Community Resource

Becky's mother attributed a major portion of her children's academic success to the family's participation in the church activities. Not only did the church provide academic support and enrichment, but also provided the family with a satisfying social life and a semblance of an extended family.

Their church/religion provided them with a version of an extended family support system which is considered important in the Hispanic culture. The church, through its emphasis on regular meetings and participation of everyone as "brothers" and "sisters", established a caring environment reminiscent of a close family. The parents truly believed that their church was a positive role model for their whole family. They believed that the church and the friendships made through church activities were sufficient to fulfill their social needs. They commented, "...church and our friends (from church), because well we all want the best for our kids and the friends I have, they all care about their kids too so my kids see that too." Explaining why the social network of the church was an important factor in their lives, Becky's mother stated that they had made many friends through the congregation. She emphasized that these were friends who could be trusted and who could provide the support and nurturing that her daughters needed as they grew up. She encouraged and supported the development of friendships for Becky through church participation.

In addition, Becky's mother emphasized how the church had made it easier for her to guide Becky toward success in school. She pointed out that their participation in church activities provided an avenue for academic success because they were encouraged to read and participate in Bible discussions regularly, " we're (church affiliation) and I think that's helped a lot..., helped Becky to achieve whatever she's done because we have something that's called (theocratic) school and they learn how to use the Bible and that's why she's learned how to speak Spanish fluently, she writes it and she speaks it real good and they, they encourage kids to study. Yea, so that has helped Becky a lot." She felt that the church meetings had helped Becky develop good reading skills because they were constantly having to read, discuss, and answer questions about their religion.

While Becky's mother believed strongly that the church activities could only positively affect her family, Becky differed somewhat in her opinion of church related activities. Like her mother, Becky did appreciate the bolstering of friendships through church activities, but she felt that it was sometimes too time consuming. Already feeling inundated with all the homework that was being assigned in high school, Becky felt that she did not have enough time to attend church activities twice a week and also be able to complete her homework. When asked whether time had hindered or helped her in high school so far, she responded, "Helped, but it's like sometimes we have church and that takes some time I have to hurry up and do my homework before I can go to church." Becky's mother acknowledged that because of the twice a week church activities, Becky could not participate in extra-curricular activities.

The Quality of the Child-Parent Relationship

The family, as a whole, seemed to get along well with each other. Rules and the consequences for breaking rules were mutually decided by the parents. The girls accepted the rules and consequences without any major problem. Becky knew that to stay out of trouble and get what she wanted, she had to simply follow her parent's rules, "...As long as I do my homework and keep my grades up and do whatever I have to do around the house, I can do something I want." She felt that they were pretty simple and straightforward rules, "We have to clean. We have to do our homework right when we get home; and then we have to get ready to go to church." Likewise, her mother talked about the rules as really being quite undemanding, "...as soon as they get home, do their homework. That's always been the main rule. And the rule is to try to keep their rooms clean, and do their chores (like wash dishes)."

Communication was prevalent in the family and considered an important aspect of their lives. Because Becky's parents did not engage in constant interaction with the school, or were never "hands on" with in-school activities, they depended on obtaining their information about school in other ways. Chief among these ways was the communication between the parents and Becky, especially the mother. Becky communicated her daily activities on a regular basis to her mother. Because Becky trusted that her mother would respond with attentiveness and empathy, she would freely tell her mother about her school and social activities. They both seemed to enjoy this process tremendously. The mother stated that it was important for her to be there for her daughter in this way, since her ability to help her daughter academically was limited, "I cannot help her by teaching her with books because my level of education is not as high as hers. But I will be interested in her work—I help her with projects if she needs help. I'll ask her about her work. I get interested in what's she's doing and whenever she is frustrated about something I help her not to feel like that." These interactions gave Becky's mother the opportunity to monitor Becky's school life closely. In addition, information about the high school was transmitted via her oldest daughter. Becky's mother felt knowledgeable about the transition to and first year of high school because her oldest daughter had previously been through these episodes. When asked if she was surprised about any experiences Becky may have experienced in her first year in high school, she responded, "...not too much surprised because I told you that I have my oldest daughter in high school already and she already went through all that." She also felt that Becky's transition was a smooth one without any problems because the older sister had coached her on what to expect.

Becky's parents sporadically attended school functions stating that they both had long days at work and church activities to attend to in the evenings. However, they realized the importance of support and praise for their children and made efforts to attend some school activities, "We try to attend the awards ceremonies...and her concerts, we try to attend the band concerts." They believed that praise for good deeds and hard work accomplished was important, and they always tried to follow through with it. They practiced praising their daughter regularly, "...well, we always like it when she comes home from school and she does good, you know, we always praise her, or we always tell her that she's doing real good and good for her and we hope she continues doing (well)..." They believed that because of the praise they bestowed on Becky for her hard work (regardless of her grades), she was always happy to bring her report card home.

In addition to monitoring Becky's school life, Becky's mother also monitored her social life closely. She was aware of Becky's whereabouts and knew who her friends were. As stated previously, most of Becky's good friends were friends from church. The parents made it a point to socialize frequently with church families (almost to the exclusion of any other families except their own) so that their daughters would establish exclusive friendships within this network. The mother felt that this was in the best interests of her children, "with friends, her closest friends are the ones she has at church rather than in school. In these days it's hard to find friends she can trust." It was also important that Becky have friends who were also high achievers in school, "She hangs around with some

friends who are also in our church. I think they all like school too. I think they get good grades, especially one friend who is also in honors."

Family Support

The family supported each other in many ways. There was a sense of cooperation versus competition among the sisters when it came to schoolwork. Becky related how her older sister helped her with her math during middle school and her first year in high school. She explained that her little sister was also helpful, "my older sister, she helps me with my Algebra II sometimes, and I help my little sister out, so it helps me to review what I've already gone through." This type of support was modeled and encouraged by the parents. Her mother admitted that she was unable to help Becky like she used to in the past, "I helped her when they were little, in elementary, once they got to middle school, I do help them with certain things like science and social studies projects, but when it comes to geometry and history of the United States, he's (husband) the one that helps." However, Becky's father was often unable to help because of his long work days. But when he was available to help, he also admitted that some of the math concepts were too difficult for him, "I look at it and I don't even know what's heads or what's tails." This could've caused problems for Becky, but instead her mother encouraged her to seek tutoring at school and to ask her teachers for help. Becky's mother also helped Becky gain confidence in her schoolwork by helping her believe in her ability to master the subject. For example, when Becky was having a difficult time with her AP Biology class during her first year in high school, her mother encouraged her to stick with it through the first six weeks to see if she might begin to understand the subject. Becky's mother told her "to give it a little more time, at least 6 weeks and by the end of those six weeks, if you feel that you really can't do it, then we'll talk to your counselor and we'll move to a regular class...so little by little she has been picking up her grades and she decided she wanted to stay." This type of encouraging advice from her mother allowed Becky to feel more comfortable with the subject and have a more positive outlook on succeeding. It is important to note here that although Becky's parents did not have regular communication with the school, they did feel comfortable talking to counselors and teachers when they believed it was necessary for them to intervene. Becky talked about how her parents tried their best to help her by giving her encouragement, talking to her counselor or teacher, if necessary, and by helping her with some schoolwork. She also acknowledged that her parents worked hard and sometimes they were too tired to help.

Besides receiving support from the immediate family, Becky's extended family also encouraged her to succeed. Her father talked about how the extended family always complimented Becky on her schoolwork. He stated, "I always get a lot of good compliments as to how mija is doing in school and that makes me feel real proud."

Conclusion

Becky believed that her family wanted her to succeed in school. She explained, "they really want me to get through high school and they don't want me to drop out or anything...they want me to be more advanced than anybody else...and get through life easier." Both parents felt confident that Becky would go to college after graduating from high school. They wanted her to accomplish whatever she needed to do in order to prepare her for college. Besides their support and encouragement, they wished that "the teachers would help her and give her confidence to succeed to go to college. See that's one thing we didn't have in high school. Teachers and counselors to guide us." Becky had similar goals in mind; she wanted to graduate with honors from high school and continue with "four more years of college so I can...I want to be a nurse."

In conclusion, Becky's successful transition from middle school to high school can be attributed to the parents' use of the community support available through their church membership, the parents use of effective parental actions and the widespread family support which was available. Thus, the parents' lack of economic resources and minimal attainment

of education did not deter the development of these other strengths which helped them guide and monitor their daughter's education.

Helen Contreras
Case Study 4:
Large Families Limiting Parental Attention
Introduction
In this presentation the focus will be on Alexandria Miller (Alex) who lived in a large, two-parent household. The affect of family size on the amount of attention and support given to Alex will be emphasized.

Family Structure

Alex was the fourth of eight children ranging from 2 to 17 years of age. Upon first interviewing Alex, she lived in a 3-bedroom home along with her mother, stepfather, three older sisters, one younger stepbrother, and three younger stepsisters-- one of whom was hearing impaired. In order to make extra space they had converted their garage into a bedroom where three of the children slept. Their home was situated in a middle-class community. It was somewhat cluttered and fairly small considering the number of people living there. During the second interview, the home was a little less cluttered due to the fact that the two oldest daughters had moved away to college.
The highest level of education both parents had completed was high school, with both having taken some college courses. Mr. Miller worked 50 to 55 hours a week in order to provide an adequate income for the family, while Mrs. Miller was able to stay home to care for the children. Mrs. Miller had attempted to work outside the home to help with the income but this proved to be more problematic since she was making very little pay and she was needed more in the home. Mr. Miller had gained much work experience and was able to be employed as a computer technician. Mrs. Miller believed that her husband could obtain a higher salary but since he had not completed college, it was this ìlittle piece of paperî that was keeping him from obtaining a better job. According to her, the income he brought in was just enough to support the family.

Home Environment

Most days were hectic in the Miller household. A typical day would start at 5:30 in the morning to ensure that everyone had enough time to prepare for school. After school some of the children had softball practice or baseball practice (depending on the season), others had dance practice, and the two oldest children had after-school jobs. It was evident that time was severely constrained for Alexís parents, Mrs. Miller stated: ìMy husband and I are going in two different directions all the time. We get to each other at night and go, ëHi, how are you? I havenít seen you all weekí.î Alex also mentioned how her mother would oftentimes be irate by the time she came home from school and she would scold her for petty little things she did wrong. It was no easy task to manage this household and it was stressful for the Millers.

Although the home was crowded the parents did provide a structured home environment. They often relied on the use of a big, white board for the children to leave them messages on when they were in need of help and it also served as a teaching aid for homework calculations and explanations. The parents set out rules pertaining to daily chores, curfews, bedtimes, and phone use. Conduct was another area of concern. Mrs. Miller explained how lying, stealing, and disrespectful behaviors were not tolerated and were grounds for severe punishment in the form of loss of privileges. Spanking was used as a last resort for the younger children. Alex reported that when rules were broken they would usually get lectured or grounded depending on the severity of the misconduct.

The family was very close and relied on each other to a great extent both physically and emotionally. The older siblings would help care for the younger siblings and they would often play games together. When Alex got picked to be a ìStepper,î which is a dance group in middle school, all of her family was excited about her accomplishment. Mrs. Miller explained how when one of Alexís sisters did not show much enthusiasm upon first hearing the good news, Alex became upset. It had been that her older sister was just coming in from school and was in a hurry to get to work so she was rushed at the time. Later on that evening, she did tell Alex how proud and happy she was for her accomplishment.

Who is Alex?

Alex did not lead a typical adolescent life and she was mature for her age. She took on major responsibilities in helping her mother care for her younger siblings. Alex reported that she often stayed up until 2 or 3 in the morning to help her mother put the youngest child to sleep. She would also help care for her deaf stepsister who needed extra attention and care. Alex displayed much patienceóthere was an instance when her younger siblings drew all over her homework and she reported getting a little irate, but understanding that they did not do so on purpose since they were to young to understand what they had done. Alex was very ambitious, even by her middle school years she already knew that she wanted to continue her education and was anxious to get out of high school before even starting. When interviewed during her 9th grade, she mentioned applying for a college scholarship. Alex wanted to get her bachelors degree so that she could become a sign language interpreter in order to help individuals like her sister who were hearing impaired. She also mentioned wanting to get a job in order to make her own money so that she would not have to rely on her parents for everything. Alex displayed a great level of maturity in understanding that her parents could not devote too much time to her because of her other siblings who needed them as well; yet she did have one wish of her parents-- that they could pay more attention to her.

Awareness and Use of Resources

Mrs. Miller was well aware of the resources available in high school since three of the children had already gone through the same school. She would often talk to Alex about what to expect from teachers and she would give her advice on how to handle the additional pressures and responsibilities in high school. She showed Alex how to organize her notebooks according to the subjects she was taking on each day. Mrs. Miller reported that both she and Mr. Miller helped Alex with some schoolwork when they could. They also relied on their computer and used tutorial web pages for extra help with homework.
Mrs. Miller also believed that the community was very resourceful. All of her friends were also parents and they looked out for the best interest of the children. Mrs. Miller mentioned how she would get advice about school from these parents when she had a school related problem with one of her children.
When it came to help with schoolwork, Alex depended primarily on her older sisters for help and she only asked her parents as a last resort. Alexís older sisters also served as resources for guidance and school advice. Upon entering the 9th grade, one of her sisters was in the 12th grade and she helped Alex find her classes the first few days of school. It became more difficult at this time for her to get help with homework since two of her sisters went away to college. Alex had to rely more on her parents when she needed help with schoolwork especially when her older sister did not have time.

Lack of Resources

According to Mrs. Miller, money was not a problem, she stated: ìit doesnít take money, all it takes is love.î Other important factors she mentioned were open communication and understanding. But according to Alex, money was a problem in that she could not have an allowance and she was limited in what type of clothes and shoes her parents could buy her. Like most of her adolescent peers, Alex wanted name brand, designer clothes and shoes but

her parents could not afford it. For this reason, Alex talked her parents into letting her apply for a job at the local hamburger place. They had a special job program for adolescents who were not 16 years of age yet, but could work for a minimal amount of hours each week. At the time of the second interview, Alex had not yet obtained the job.

Lack of time was clearly a problem. Both Mrs. Miller and Alex admitted that there was a lack of time for everyone given the size of the family. During the first interview when asked, what came in the way of helping Alex with schoolwork, Mrs. Miller replied-- ìBabies, supper, other children, (lack of) time.î Alex stated, ìMy other sisters and brother come in the way (of getting parental help with homework) because they need help too sometimes.î Even with the two oldest daughters out of the home, the situation did not change, there was simply not enough time to help everyone.

It was evident that Alex was not getting the individualized attention she needed with schoolwork given that her end of the year grades in the 9th grade were less than average. Mrs. Miller truly believed Alex was doing very well in school. When asked how Alexís grades were on her first 9th grade report card, she overestimated her grades. Mrs. Miller stated that they were mostly Aís and Bís and some Cís. According to Alex, ****the actual report card transcript, Alex had received one A and two Bís-- in Dance, Theater, and Spanish, respectively. The rest of her grades consisted of mostly Cís in her core classes, and one low D in Geography.

With the number of children in the household, it was obvious that Mrs. Miller was getting the childrenís grades mixed up; in fact, throughout the interviews she had to remind herself which child the questions were being asked about. It is clear to see how Alexís academic difficulties could have been left unnoticed. Although they knew that Alex could get help from tutors at school they were not really aware that she was in need of additional help and for this reason they did not take action.

Another example of the lack of attention was that Mrs. Miller had little knowledge of who Alexís friends were. She did mention knowing that they were from her dance class and believed they were good students. She stated that she trusted Alexís judgment regarding friends and the only trouble they ever caused her was when they had personal problems and Alex would help them. Because of this, Alex would miss doing a homework assignment and would have to turn it in late.

Given that neither parent had pursued a higher degree, it may have also been that they did not truly believe that getting a 4-year degree was necessary. When asked how high an education she wanted Alex to receive, Mrs. Miller responded that she wanted Alex to get an Associates degree rather than a Bachelorís degree or higher. So it was evident that having straight Aís or at least Bís was not very important to Alexís parents. Alex on the other hand did want to be on the honor rolls but given her first year grades she was not on the way to reaching this goal.

Conclusion

Alexís parents believed that she was on the right track given that she seldom got into trouble, for this reason they concentrated their efforts on her younger siblings who appeared to be more in need of their help and guidance. It was easy to see how Alex could fall through the cracks and her problems could go unnoticed. She was well mannered and tried her best to not get in the way. In many similar cases such young adolescents may act out negatively for attention, but Alex was differentóshe thought more logically and reasonably. Alex mentioned that she did not want to ìbotherî her parents too much for help with schoolwork and did not want to be a burden.

Alex came from a home that was fairly organized and structured with rules and forms of punishment for not following the rules. Her family was also very close and united which is evident in the way they helped each other. Mrs. Miller was well aware of academic resources and school procedures having older daughters whom had gone through the same schools. Yet, all of these things were not enough to keep Alex on the right track to reaching her academic goals. The main reason was that the size of the family impeded the amount of

time and attention available for Alex. She was in need of a tutor and this school resource was not being used. It was clear that she needed more help with schoolwork and she was not receiving it.

Alex had stated that she wanted to be on the honor roll in high school, her first semester grades in high school showed that she was barely passing all of her core classes. She was also in danger of failing one class. Alex also wanted to obtain a bachelor degree and become a sign language interpreter. It is most certain that she would need to get better grades in order to get admitted into a university to obtain her degree. Her chances of getting a college scholarship would also be impeded without decent grades. Without the individualized attention Alex needed, her chances would be slim that she could achieve her long-term academic goals.

Case Study 5: Low-Income Neighborhoods and Ineffective Parental Actions

Chris LaBonte

Introduction

The student in the family that I am presenting failed to transition successfully into high school. Gary Jones was first interviewed at the end of his eighth grade year, as he was struggling to complete his final semester of middle school. Although he did finish the eighth grade, after his first six weeks in high school he was failing his courses and had been indefinitely suspended from the school.

The purpose of this presentation is to describe Gary's environment, and to present what appear to be some important contributing factors to Gary's failure. Accordingly, this paper will provide a description of Gary's family and his living situation, problems between Gary and his mother, and how many of the scholastic problems that Gary was facing in middle school were exacerbated as he moved into a high school setting.

Setting

At the time of the interviews Gary lived with his mother, Kay, in a three bedroom, single story house just outside the downtown area of a small city. Their house was situated in an older section of town which seemed to have both low and high income houses. During the first interview Kay pointed out several neighboring houses around her house and indicated that the kids who lived there took drugs. The outside of Gary's house appeared dilapidated and unkempt. A number of items were strewn about the yard, which contained approximately seven dogs. The first interview took place outside in the yard, at Gary's mother's request.

During the interview, Kay indicated that only one adult lived in the household even though Gary's grandmother also lived there. Kay explained this inconsistency by saying: "She's separate, she doesn't count, it's like having a roommate, she lives here but she doesn't interfere with Gary and I." Indeed, conversations with Gary's grandmother indicated that she often had no notion on the whereabouts of Gary or his mother.

Kay stated that Gary's father did not live with the family and that she had no information on his father's location or status. Gary has two siblings, an older brother Danny, and an older sister Liz. Danny was twenty three years old at the time of the interviews and did not live with the family. Kay described Danny as mentally challenged. Gary did not seem to have an especially strong bond with his older brother. Kay mentioned that both Liz and Gary would often tease Danny and they had difficulty accepting his mental limitations.

Gary's sister Liz was eighteen years old at the time of the interviews and was not living at home. According to Kay, Liz had made straight A's throughout high school without putting forth much effort. Liz was three months away from graduating from high school when she ran away from home. Liz had returned to live at home but then left again after only a few weeks. Kay indicated that Gary was strongly attached to Liz, and that when she left the second time Gary was devastated.

Gary's mother had graduated from high school, but did not have a college degree. She had a full time job working at an electronic assembly factory. Kay had also been taking classes at a local community college. Although she seemed to be able to provide for Gary's basic needs, these interviews indicated that she could not always afford to get Gary the things that he wanted.

Perhaps as a result of the family's limited resources, Gary had taken a job at a local grocery store where he worked part time as a grocery sacker. Gary seemed to spend the money he earned on personal items, such as a phone for his room.

Kay indicated confidence in her academic skills, and a willingness to help Gary with his homework. Gary also indicated that his mother was a good tutor. Kay had even changed jobs and stopped taking classes at the local community college in order to be more available to Gary. Despite her availability and willingness, Gary was failing most of his classes.

Interaction between Gary and his mother

Although there were a number of important environmental factors which seemed to contribute to Gary's academic problems, Gary also had behavioral problems, and problems communicating with his mother.

RULES

Although there were some basic household rules that both Kay and Gary knew. Gary did not seem to have a clear understanding of what was appropriate behavior and what was not. When asked how the rules were decided Gary simply responded "When she gets mad she just comes up with the rules". Kay on the other hand indicated that these rules were often made by discussing them with Gary. Many of the family's rules seem to have been created as a reaction to Gary's inappropriate actions. Kay may create rules this way because of an inability to anticipate problems with Gary.

Kay's primary method of disciplining Gary was to take away either his stereo or phone privileges. She used this disciplinary technique for minor as well as major infractions. For example Gary's TV and phone privileges were taken away when he would talk on the phone past 10:00 PM, and when he was suspended from school.

These disciplinary techniques seemed to be effected by the financial difficulties that the family experienced. For example Gary felt that restricting his phone privileges was unfair as he had bought his own phone, and although Gary had a curfew of ten PM his job often required that he stay at work past eleven PM.

FRIENDS

In addition to scholastic difficulties Gary was also experiencing problems with his mother regarding his friends. Kay disapproved of Gary's friends suspecting that they took drugs. She said " I know for a fact that their brothers are into drugs and their parents are into drugs, you know, and I've, I've wondered a couple of times whether Gary is too, but he hasn't shown too much of that kind of behavior. Sometimes I wonder, but, you know, it's not like, he doesn't steal or, or cause a lot of trouble, most of the times." Kay's approach to Gary's potential drug problems seems typical of her overall approach with Gary. That is, although she suspected that he may be in trouble, she did not act until she found out that he really was in trouble.

Gary's interactions with his friends was having a negative effect on his education. For example in the eighth grade, Gary was taking Ritalin and one of Gary's friends indicated that his older brother liked to take Ritalin to "get high". Gary agreed give, his friend his daily Ritalin medication. Gary was caught and suspended from school.

Although Kay was very upset by this, rather than forbidding Gary to interact with this boy she simply suspended Gary from the television, telephone.

NEW FRIENDS

When Gary entered high school he made several new friends whom Kay felt were a very bad influence on Gary. She said of them "They don't care about anything. They don't care about themselves, they don't care about each other, I have never met such negative people in my entire life. They are dirty, they are nasty. Like I said they just don't care period".

Kay felt that Gary's new friends were encouraging him to skip school, and take drugs. Again despite her impression of Gary's friends Kay did not prevent Gary from being with them. Kay recalled one night when one of Gary's new friends was over. Kay had a negative feeling about the situation but she let Gary's friend stay. She felt that Gary and his friend were going to leave the house and she kept asking Gary whether or not he was. He assured her several times that he was not, but after Kay went to sleep. Gary and his friend left and ran away from home.

When Gary returned home several days later he was not allowed to communicate with any of his friends from home. Kay indicated, however, that she did not feel that she could prevent Gary from talking to these friends in school .

Gary and Kay seemed to continually struggle for authority. Although Kay tried to control Gary's behavior, through reasoning, punishment, and positive influence, ultimately if none of these tactics worked Kay allowed Gary to do as he wished. Although Kay knew that Gary's friends were a bad influence she was unwilling to prevent Gary from seeing them until something major had happened. And although Kay suspected that Gary was taking drugs, she refrained from action until she was sure. This pattern was also evident in the way that Kay dealt with Gary's scholastic problems.

Interactions between Gary, Kay, and the Public Schools

Clearly, much of the responsibility for Gary's academic failure rests on Gary. He seemed to have a lax attitude about his school work and an unrealistic perception of the relationship between his academic performance and his future. For example Gary indicated that he was doing fine in school even though he had failed four out of six classes.

Scholastic Problems

Although Kay was willing and able to help Gary with his school work. She did not take an active role in his academic work. Even though Gary was clearly struggling in school, Kay continually let Gary decide whether or not she would be allowed to help him. When asked: "What comes in the way of you helping Gary with schoolwork?" Kay's responded: "Nothing, except that he don't ask. I mean, I've always, I've purposely kept jobs in the daytime so I would be here in the evening, and I'm here in the evenings, I'm here on the weekends, but he doesn't ask too much anymore."

Kay intervened in Gary's scholastic problems only when the situation had reached dire circumstances. For example she reported that she had only offered to help Gary with a major science project the night before it was due. Her reticence to take a proactive role in Gary's scholastic experience is most evident, however, in the way that Kay addressees Gary's considerable disciplinary problems at school.

Disciplinary Problems

During the first interview Kay had speculated that Gary's eighth grade behavior problems may be an attempt to fail the eighth grade and remain in middle school. She stated: "This has not been a good year for Gary. He is really not looking forward to, going

to the high school. He's been trying real hard to fail". Despite this belief Kay had not discussed these concerns with Gary or the school.

Kay also indicated that both she and Gary felt that high school would be considerably harder for him both academically and behaviorally. Kay praised the middle school stating that she believed that Gary would already have failed eighth grad had it not been for the flexible nature of the middle school. Kay felt that high school was going to be more difficult and less flexible, yet despite her belief she did little to prepare either the school, or Gary for his freshman year.

Predictably, Gary did experience considerable difficulties when he entered high school. The high school that Gary attended had over three thousand students, a very large campus, a strict tardy policy, and a strict behavior policy. Due to scheduling difficulties at the beginning of the year Gary's schedule was changed a number of times. Gary took advantage of this confusion and started skipping some of his classes. Kay began receiving calls from the school informing her that Gary was not in class. She confronted Gary about his truancy, but did not push the issue when he asserted that he was indeed at school.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of Gary's misbehavior was an altercation he had with the principal. Apparently the principal had stopped Gary in the hall and was talking to him. Gary became upset and walked away, the principal grabbed Gary and Gary had then shoved, or hit the principal. The principal called the police, and Gary was arrested. At the time of our second interview because of this incident Gary had been out of school for roughly one week, and was suspended indefinitely.

Despite Kay's difficulty in anticipating and preventing Gary's behavioral problems, she seemed extremely skilled at advocating for her son after he had gotten into trouble. She had intervened successfully for him at the end of his eighth grade year when, due to his many absences, he was in danger of failing yet Kay found it considerably more difficult, to advocate for Gary with the high school.

After Gary's altercation with the principal. Kay had been up to the school several times, and she had talked to the principal, and the superintendent a number of times. As a result of her advocacy a meeting was scheduled with Gary, Kay the principal and the superintendent.

Despite her intervention however Kay did not seem optimistic about Gary's scholastic future. She indicated that this interaction had soured Gary and herself toward the school.

Prologue

In a follow-up telephone conversation Kay indicated that Gary had been allowed to return to the high school. He had attended for a number of weeks, but he had again dropped out. After dropping out Gary had become more involved with drugs and made an attempt to take his own life. In the final phone conversation Kay indicated that Gary was in jail, and that she was looking for a drug treatment center for him.